

Three Things the Holy Spirit Gives to Every Believer

by Bayless Conley

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Well, did you come with a hungry heart? All right. I hope you're ready. If you have a Bible, you can open to 1 Thessalonians 1.

I hope you're ready out on the plaza or online or wherever you happen to be watching or listening from right now. I have a really simple message to share with you today, really simple.

I'm going to talk to you about three things that the Holy Spirit gives to every believer. Three things the Holy Spirit gives to every believer: assurance, access, and ability. Assurance, access, and ability. Now, as we read here, in 1 Thessalonians 1, Paul is talking to them about when he first came to the city of Thessalonica and preached the gospel to them.

If we were to take the time, we would just need to go back to Acts 17. And it actually records that event when he came and brought the good news to them, and many of them came to Christ. And so now, he's relating back to it. In verse 5 of chapter 1 in 1 Thessalonians, he says, 1 Thessalonians 1:5–6 NLT,

⁵ For when we brought you the Good News, it was not only with words but also with power, for the Holy Spirit gave you full assurance that what we said was true. And you know of our concern for you from the way we lived when we were with you. ⁶ So you received the message with joy from the Holy Spirit in spite of the severe suffering it brought you. In this way, you imitated both us and the Lord.

Now, he says, "When we brought you the Good News," it wasn't just words, but it came with power. It's interesting. That word "power" is the same word translated "miracle" throughout the New Testament and is mostly used in connection with divine healing.

And we know that the apostle Paul through reading through the book of Acts, many of the places that he went, his ministry was accentuated with healings and miracles and the preaching of the gospel.

So he said, look, "When we came, it wasn't just with words, but it was with power." Yet, if you go back and read in Acts 17, where it happened, there's not a record of a single healing taking place. There's not a single recorded miracle that took place there. Now, perhaps they did, but it's an assumption because we don't know. The Bible doesn't tell us that there were. There were in other places and we're specifically told. But when he was in Thessalonica, as far as the scriptural record goes, he just preached. And yet Paul says when we preached, when we brought the message, it wasn't just with words, it was with power.

Now, the power he's talking about was an inward work of power that brought assurance and joy. He's very clear. It says it came with power, for the Holy Spirit gave you full assurance. And you received the message, you received the truth, with joy from the Holy Spirit. That was

Three Things the Holy Spirit Gives to Every Believer

supernatural. It was deep. It was amazing, but it was an inward work of the Holy Spirit, not an outward work.

When they heard the gospel preached, the Holy Spirit gave them an unmistakable, powerful inward assurance that the message was true. And then, once they embraced it and believed, the Holy Spirit gave them joy and a deep assurance that they now belonged to the Lord.

Let me put it another way. They knew, and you can know that you are saved. If you're just hoping to get into heaven when you die, you're in serious trouble. If you just hope, "Well, I hope that when I die, that I'll receive eternal life. I hope I get into heaven." If that's where you stand today, my friend, you are in serious trouble. You better know, and you can know that you know that you are saved.

Somebody says, "Well, how can a person be sure? How can a person know that they're saved?" Well, by one reason. Through the powerful deep assurance that the Holy Spirit brings.

Listen to these words from the apostle John in 1 John 5:13. He said,

¹³ These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.

"That you may know that you have eternal life." Not you're hoping to get it one day, not maybe, not guessing. You know that you have eternal life. It's something that we know.

He said in 1 John 3:24,

²⁴ And by this we know . . .

Everyone say, "We know." We're not hoping, we know.

And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.

And that Holy Spirit that God has given us brings us a deep, unmistakable assurance about the truth of the message and the truth of the salvation experience.

First John 4:13,

¹³ By this we know (we know) that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.

When I got saved in the little street mission all those years ago, I was the only one that responded and came forward. No one else responded that night. The room was full of people. I don't know if they weren't touched like I was, I don't know. And I walked forward sobbing uncontrollably. Now, I didn't know a lot. I couldn't have answered many questions. There were a whole lot of things I did not understand, but I knew that salvation was real, and I had it. And I knew that Jesus Christ was real and that He had me.

There was a whole lot of stuff I didn't know, hadn't worked out. Again, I couldn't have answered your questions, but I knew salvation was real, and I had it, and I knew He was real, and that He had me.

Three Things the Holy Spirit Gives to Every Believer

Harrison used to play basketball in high school, and I don't recall what precipitated it exactly, but I think it was due to some family crisis or something. But another kid that played basketball on the high school team, their father came to church. And I gave an invitation, and back in that day, almost always, we would have people come forward that wanted to receive Christ. And they'd stand in the front, and we would lead them in a prayer. And he came forward with a group of people and prayed, tears streaming down his face.

Well, about a week later, I'm over at the high school watching Harrison play ball, and I see that father. He's standing courtside. And so I walk up to him, I say, "Hey, how are you doing?" And he looks at me and says, "He's so good." And he bursts into tears, and he starts crying uncontrollably. And we're starting to kind of get a crowd, "What's going on with this guy? Do we need to call security?"

And this guy is crying and crying. And he's basically saying, "He's so real. I didn't know. He's so good. He's so good." He started getting embarrassed, and he couldn't stop crying. And people were looking at us, and he's wiping his tears, and he kept saying, "He's so good. He's so good." Well, that was that assurance that the Holy Spirit brings.

I told the story, not too long about ago, about a gardener we had years ago. And he would come and cut the grass and trim the hedges, et cetera. And I'd go out in the yard and talk to him about Jesus. And he got really tired of me. But I kept going after him. And he just blew me off, and it was quite obvious. "Look, I'm here to cut your grass, not to hear you preach," but I was pretty relentless.

And so I come out and talk to him. And he's just like, at one point, just kind of rudely, just like, "Enough." Anyway, some weeks after that, I get a phone call from him. He says, "I got to come over and see you." It's not his normal day to come cut the grass. I said, "Yes, come on."

So he comes over to the house. He's crying and walks up in the yard. And again, I'm not sure what precipitated it. I think it was some crisis he was going through. And in desperation, he went and got his daughter's children's Bible, sat in his daughter's room, opened it, and began to read, and called on the Lord. And God came to him. And he's standing in my yard, and he says, "I prayed, and I talked to Jesus." He said, "I didn't know He was so real. That's what you were trying to tell me. Isn't it? That's what you've been trying to tell me. He's real." And he kept saying it over and over, "I didn't know He was so real. He's so real. You tried to tell me. You tried to tell me. He's real."

Now, friend, the Holy Spirit brings an assurance to every child of God. But listen, you don't have to experience some soaring emotions to validate your salvation experience. Some of us, we're wired up differently.

Now, I sobbed like a child when I got saved, but I think I'm kind of wired up that way. I still pretty much every day cry. Sitting in my kitchen, reading my Bible, and I think about what God's done in my life and where I used to be. I have not forgotten where I came from. I sit in my kitchen, and I cry. But it's the way I'm wired.

I mean, I remember taking Rebecca to go see *Beauty and the Beast*. She's a kid, we're sitting in the movie, and I'm crying. She goes, "Dad, stop it. It's embarrassing." I said, "Sorry, baby, this is me. This is what I do."

Three Things the Holy Spirit Gives to Every Believer

Sometimes the emotions are interwoven. And thank God for that, but you don't have to experience these surging emotions to validate the experience. But you should have a powerful inward assurance from the Holy Spirit. I do know from Scripture that you should have that. He gives us assurance.

The second thing He gives us is access, and assurance leads to access. I want to read to you from Hebrews 10:19,

¹⁹ Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, ²¹ and having a High Priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Now, this was written to Hebrew Christians. Every Hebrew believer understood what the writer of Hebrews was saying to them. They understood the symbolism. Every one of them understood the high priest and his role. Every one of them knew what the holiest was. They understood about the temple, they understood about the veil, they understood about the sprinkling of blood, and the washing of water.

They had the temple, there's the outer part of the temple, and then there's this veil or this curtain. And behind it is the ark of the covenant. And it was the place where God's manifested presence dwelt under the old covenant.

And the high priest was the only one allowed to go into the holiest place or into the Holy of Holies, and he could only go one time a year. And before he went in, he had to wash his body outwardly with water. And he would take the blood of an animal, and he would sprinkle it, and come in and offer sacrifice for his sins and the sins of the people.

And he's telling us that because of the precious blood of Jesus, every believer can now come boldly into the very presence of God. And the Holy Spirit washes us clean inwardly and outwardly and gives us access into the very presence of God. It's not just the high priest one time a year. Now it is the right of every single believer to come directly into God's presence.

Now because of the precious blood of Jesus and the Holy Spirit's work in giving us assurance, we can come boldly.

Ephesians 2:18 says,

¹⁸ For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.

Now both; he's talking about Jewish believers and Gentile believers. Through Jesus Christ, we both have access. Everyone say, "access."

We have access to the Father because of the Holy Spirit's work in regeneration and in giving us assurance. Because of what He has done, we can come boldly.

Listen to this. It's Ephesians 3:12. This is from the Amplified Bible. Listen to it.

Three Things the Holy Spirit Gives to Every Believer

It says (Ephesians 3:12 AMP),

¹² In Whom,

(speaking of Jesus)

. . . because of our faith in Him, we dare to have the boldness (courage and confidence) of free access (an unreserved approach to God with freedom and without fear).

Boldness. Access. An unreserved approach.

Have you ever been around a dignitary or maybe somebody that was really famous? And, I mean, you don't just go, "Hey, what's going on?" You're reserved. You come around people like that, and you act in a reserved manner. But this says we have an unreserved approach to God. We belong in His presence.

Hebrews 4:16 says,

¹⁶ Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

My friend, we're not beggars. We have been born anew and are now beloved members of the family. And with boldness, we can come to Him and let our requests be made known.

One day a week, we have a family night at our house. I cook, and it's a bit of orchestrated mayhem at the house. It's a lot of fun. We all hang around. And I'm in the kitchen cooking one day, everybody started to arrive, and Sawyer, one of the grandsons, disappears, and then he comes into the kitchen, and he's holding one of my knives. I like knives. I've got quite a few. But he went in my bedroom in my sock drawer where I keep some of my knives, and he comes out with a very nice expensive knife.

So here he comes, and he walks in the kitchen and says, "Papa, can I have this?" Now I knew he just marched right into my bedroom, didn't ask, went into my sock drawer, took out one of my finest knives, and comes down and says, "Papa, can I have this?" Somebody says, "Did you get mad because he went into your sock drawer?" No. I actually liked it. I liked his boldness. "Were you mad because he asked for one of your very best knives?" No. "Did you give him the knife?" Well, not right then. But he inspired me.

So about a month and a half later, for Christmas, I gave Sawyer that knife. But not just him. I gave everybody in the family a knife. That was the Christmas present. My daughter, daughters-in-law, everybody got a knife. Everybody did.

Now, Clay, he was only five at that time, so I didn't give him a knife. I gave him a hatchet. I did. I gave him a 100-year-old hatchet. But Sawyer just inspired me. He came in like he belonged. And the truth is, he did.

Come to the Father. You have access to Him through the Spirit. And when you come, come like Sawyer, and you will find mercy and grace to help you in your time of need.

Three Things the Holy Spirit Gives to Every Believer

The Holy Spirit gives us assurance, and He gives us immediate and constant bold access to the Father.

The third thing the Holy Spirit gives to every believer is ability. Won't you look with me if you would or just listen. First Peter 4, I'm going to be reading from the Living Bible. First Peter 4:10–11. It says this,

¹⁰ God has given each of you some special abilities.

Tell your neighbor, "You weren't left out." Just tell them. God didn't leave you out. And these special abilities He gave through the Holy Spirit. God has given each of you some special abilities.

. . . be sure to use them to help each other, passing on to others God's many kinds of blessings. ¹¹ Are you called to preach? Then preach as though God himself were speaking through you. Are you called to help others? Do it with all the strength and energy that God supplies so that God will be glorified through Jesus Christ—to him be glory and power forever and ever. Amen.

I would encourage you to take some time and look in the book of Romans in the 12th chapter. We're given a more expanded list of some of these grace gifts, some of these abilities that everyone's given. Prophecy is listed. Teaching is listed. Showing mercy and kindness is listed. Giving encouragement is listed. Giving material things generously that is listed as one of those gifts. Serving is listed. And it's a pretty extensive list. And each and every one of those abilities is distributed to us through the Holy Spirit. Even as it said in 1 Corinthians 12:11, talking about the manifestations of the Spirit. It says,

¹¹ It is the one and only Spirit who distributes all these gifts. He alone decides which gift each person should have.

I can't do everything, but I can do some things. But just because my gifts are different than your gifts, that doesn't mean mine are less important than yours. I can't do it all. I can't be it all. You can't do it all. You can't be it all, but God has endowed you with certain abilities. He has given you certain gifts.

Now, I was an assistant pastor for a couple of years. And the church was actually located in the town of Beaumont, as you'd go out towards Palm Springs. The pastor's name was Dan. And he very graciously took me under his wing and imparted quite a bit to me.

And he tried to sort of school me on how he would counsel people. So if he'd have a counseling session, there might be a couple that would come in or somebody else with some problems, he would invite me to come. So I'd sit in a corner. I was the fly on the wall. I'd sit in the corner of the office. And a couple would sit down, and they would share their problems. I'd be thinking, "This is impossible. There's no answer to that. They just threw him a catch-22. It's like they just set a trap for him. There's no way out."

And I'd be sitting there, and Dan would get real quiet for a minute, and then he'd share something with them that was astonishing. And I'd think, "Where'd you get that? Where'd that come from?" I literally sometimes felt, I think, like the people felt in the crowd when the religious leaders brought that woman; she was caught in adultery in the very act. They throw her down in

Three Things the Holy Spirit Gives to Every Believer

the midst, and they tell Jesus, saying, “Look, we caught her committing adultery. Now Moses and the law say that she should be stoned. What do you say?”

And Jesus, He just kneels down, starts writing in the dirt, and just gets quiet for a minute. And then He stands back up and says, “All right, the one of you without sin, let him throw the first stone.” Nobody saw that coming. Like, “Where did You get that?” Astonishing. That’s the way I felt. We’d be sitting there. Somebody would share this dilemma. And I’d think, “You should just quit. There’s no answer to that. You’re done. Just quit.” And Dan, time after time, he’d just get quiet, and then he’d share this answer. And I would sit there. My jaw would be on the carpet. Astonishing. Well, it was a Holy Spirit endowment that he had.

My friend, you do, if you’re one of God’s children, you do have an ability or abilities from the Holy Spirit. Your gifts may not be flashy or dramatic, but they are needed. Be it exhortation, generous giving, bringing comfort and compassion, or just being that stalwart friend. There is something about your presence. It brings peace and stability into the stormy lives of others. And you may not even recognize you have that gift, but people want to be in your presence.

They think, “I don’t know what it is about her, but every time I get around her, I’ve got hope.” “I don’t know what it is about him, but I just get around him, and I feel like things are going to work out.” And I think some of you, you’re already unconsciously, you’re operating in an ability that God’s given you, and you haven’t even recognized it. To you, it’s effortless. It’s who you are.

You might even ask some trusted friends. Say, look, “What would you say that my gifts are? If God’s given me something, what would you say?” Sometimes other people can recognize stuff in you that you don’t know yourself.

When the church was born, there was a guy, and he was just encouraging everybody. And so all the disciples they changed his name. They changed his name to Barnabas. It means son of encouragement. They said this is what this guy does. This is who he is. He’s an encourager. And if you read Barnabas’s life in the New Testament, that’s what he did everywhere. When nobody wanted to have anything to do with Paul, he put his arm around him and said, “Look, this guy’s got a God thing going on in him. I believe in him.” Encourager. He encouraged John Mark. That’s what he did. He was an encourager.

You do have something in you. God hasn’t left you out. And you need to discover what it is and then begin to use that ability to help and to bless others. You are needed.

And when good things happen, make sure you give all the glory to God. If you will begin to do that, I believe you’ll see that gift enlarged. If you begin to give credit where credit’s due, I believe you’ll begin to see new opportunities and that God will expand what He’s put within you.

Paul said it well, and I want to read it to you. This is 2 Corinthians 3:5. Again, the Amplified Bible. He said,

⁵ Not that we are fit (qualified and sufficient in ability) of ourselves to form personal judgments or to claim or count anything as coming from us, but our power and ability and sufficiency are from God.

Our power, our ability, and our sufficiency, they come from God.

Three Things the Holy Spirit Gives to Every Believer

I talked about giving Sawyer that 100-year-old hatchet I had. I actually have a few hatchets and axes. I have cut a lot of wood. I've split a lot of wood in my life. When I used to live in Oregon, winters were cold, and that was the only way that I got heat. And so I spent a lot of time with an ax in my hand.

And I keep, in my backyard now, I keep a little small ax back there. And I've got a little sort of a mobile fire pit. And I split a lot of wood in my backyard. One of my happy places is to sit in front of a fire. I made one last night and sat in front of the fire. And I just like fires, and I don't mind splitting the wood.

I'd take that little ax and get my grinder out, and I'll put a sharp edge on it. But you know, wouldn't it be odd for that little ax head to start boasting and say, "Look, nobody chops wood like me. I am so sharp. When the wood sees me coming, it begins to tremble. I hold an edge like nobody's business." Wait a minute, little ax head, don't you remember somebody created you? Do you realize somebody created you to hold an edge? Do you remember somebody putting that grinder on you and giving you that sharp edge? And do you remember that when that wood was being split, someone was wielding you?

My friend, when the good things happen, whatever area you are sharp in that you've got that spiritual sharpness, and wherever you produce results, you need to remember that Somebody else is wielding you. We are an instrument in His hands, and He's the one that should be receiving the glory.

Now I want to bring it back full circle. The Holy Spirit gives us assurance, gives us access, and He gives us each abilities.

Assurance. When I first became a Christian, I tried to talk people into being saved all the time. I'd share the gospel with people, but I just wanted to somehow open their heads and stuff the truth, like, "Can't you see it?" And I realized that the only thing I can do, the only thing I can do, is share the message and live the life. I can't do anything else. Only the Holy Spirit can bring the assurance that the message is true.

Only the Holy Spirit can convict a heart of their need of a Savior. I can't do that. All I can do is what the Bible calls foolishness. God has chosen through the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe. And if I do my part, the Holy Spirit can do His part. I can't give you that assurance. I can't do it. Holy Spirit can and He will.

Paul said, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God made it grow." We can't make it grow, friend. But if we do our part, the Holy Spirit will do His part.

Maybe you've come here today. You're sitting out on the plaza, sitting in the auditorium. You may be sitting in your home, wherever you might be right now. There's a reason you're listening to me.

You could be anywhere, with family, you could have traveled, but you've taken the time to come to God's house to listen to a message today. Why is that? Well, hopefully, because you know the importance when God says not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together. But there are some you've yet to commit your lives to Christ.

You could be doing anything right now, but you're here. I think, working behind the scenes, there's a God in heaven who knows your name, who loves you more than you can understand,

Three Things the Holy Spirit Gives to Every Believer

and He wants you to be part of His family. He wants you to have the boldness of a Sawyer, to just walk right in and go into God's sock drawer and say, "Papa, I want this. I need this." God is delighted when we are unreserved in His presence. Yes, I have a reverential fear of God. He's my maker. I understand that. I'm not flippant in my Father's presence, but I'm comfortable there. I didn't do that. Holy Spirit did that.

Maybe you've been coming for a while, checking things out, but you've yet to commit your life to the Savior.

We had a guy one time. He was coming to the church for about four months. This is back when we were in a little commercial office building on the boulevard here. He was a great guy, come up after services. He was there every time the doors were open, every Wednesday night, every Sunday night, every Sunday morning. He would shake my hand and say, "Oh, pastor, that's the best message yet." Always encouraged me.

Then after four months, I gave an invitation, and he came forward in the invitation to receive Christ. And I remember looking at him and thinking, "What are you doing?" Anyway, he prayed with everybody. Afterward, I went over to him and said, "Why the heck did you come up?" He says, "Well, I wanted to get saved." I said, "What do you mean? You weren't saved?" He says, "No, I've never put my trust in Jesus before." He says, "I've been checking you out to see if this thing was real. I'd just been watching and just been listening, and today, I decided I wanted Him as my Savior."

I was shocked. I had read him all wrong. I thought he was family in the sense that he had embraced Christ already, but he hadn't. And maybe that's you. You're just coming and checking things out. That's okay.

But if the Holy Spirit has brought you to that place, today, if you hear His voice, you don't want to harden your heart. You don't want to put it off. And I will say, for me, from the first time the little 12-year-old kid told me about Jesus in the park, it was like a light began to dawn on me.

It was progressive, like the slow dawning of the morning, that assurance came, until the culmination point when I said yes to Christ in that street mission that night. Then everything changed for me. You know, it's been, I don't know, 46 years or something. I've never one time doubted my salvation in all these years. Not once. I never even entertained the thought. I've never entertained the thought once that heaven might not be real or that hell might not be real.

I've never wasted a second doubting that. I know that I know. I've never doubted that the Bible is real and that it's God's Word. I know that I know.

You see, a man with an experience is never at the mercy of another man with an argument. I know Him, and you can know Him too.

I want to lead you in a simple prayer. The truth is we are all cut off from God because of sin. We've all sinned, the Scripture says. And when we couldn't reach God, in His mercy, He reached down to us, and He sent His own Son. Jesus, born of a virgin, lived a sinless life and showed us what God was like, not aloof and distant, but near, full of love and concern for broken, hurting people.

And then Jesus was taken by wicked hands, put through a mock trial, beaten without mercy, and crucified. And there on that cross, He became our substitute. God literally took the penalty

Three Things the Holy Spirit Gives to Every Believer

for our sins and laid them on His own Son. And Jesus died under the weight of our sins. He was judged so we could go free. Eternity won't be long enough to comprehend or to grasp the depths that Christ went to lift us high.

After the claims of God's eternal justice were satisfied on that third day, Jesus was raised from the dead. And here's what the Bible says. This is the message. If you believe in your heart God raised Him from the dead, and if you confess Him with your mouth as Lord, it means boss, that God brings you into a relationship called salvation. And that's when the Holy Spirit does that inward change, does that inward work in you.

And so, I want to invite you to pray with me right now. Whether you're on the plaza, in here, nobody can pray this prayer for you. I can lead you in the prayer. If you'll tie a sincere heart around it, my friend, God will meet you. Maybe right now, just put your hand over your heart. Backslider, come on, prodigal son, come on, prodigal daughter, come on home. Won't you pray with me. Say it out loud.

Say,

"Oh God, I come to You today. With all of my heart, I believe Jesus Christ is Your Son. I believe He died on the cross to pay for all my sins. I believe He was raised from the dead. And today, I make a choice. This is my choice alone. I say yes to You, Jesus. I say yes to Your Lordship. Be my Savior. Be my Good Shepherd. Come into my life. From this moment forward, wherever You lead me, I'll go, Jesus. Amen."

Amen.

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